

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY BONN

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SUBJ: CURRENT SITUATION IN CAMBODIA

REF : BONN 4516

EMBASSY MAY PASS TO BARENDONCK FOLLOWING STATEMENT ON CURRENT SITUATION IN THE KHMER REPUBLIC. BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED. DESPITE A DIFFICULT MILITARY SITUATION, THERE IS POLITICAL STABILITY IN THE KHMER REPUBLIC. MARSHAL LON NOL, THE PRESIDENT SINCE JUNE 1972, IS THE PREDOMINANT POLITICAL FIGURE IN THE COUNTRY, THOUGH HIS POPULARITY, AT AN ALL-TIME HIGH AT THE TIME OF THE DEPOSITION OF SIHANOUK IN MARCH 1970, HAS SLIPPED DUE TO WAR WEARINESS AND THE STRAINS OF WAR ON A PEACEFUL AND SIMPLE SOCIETY. (PARA) LON NOL' S BASIC SUPPORT COMES FROM THE ARMED FORCES AND THE CIVIL SERVICE BUREAUCRACY. (PARA) THE URBAN ELITE OF THE NATION ACCEPTED AND PARTICIPATED IN THE DEPOSITION OF SIHANOUK AND THE MONARCHY AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NEW REPUBLIC. THEY VIEWED THESE DEVELOPMENTS AS THE ADVENT OF A NEW ERA, AND THERE HAVE BEEN INEVITABLE DISAPPOINTMENTS
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WHEN DAMAGES, CASUALTIES AND ECONOMIC DISRUPTION WERE REALIZED AS THE COUNTRY FACED WHAT WAS FOR IT, TOTAL WAR. THIS DISAPPOINTMENT HAS RESULTED IN VOCAL CRITICISM OF THE GOVERNMENT, BOYCOTTING OF THE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS BY THE OPPOSITION AND STRIKES FOR HIGHER WAGES. THE GKR HAS RESPONDED TO STRIKING TEACHERS' DEMANDS FOR SOME BASIC REFORMS IS NOW IN THE PROCESS OF IMPLEMENTING THEM, SUCH AS TIGHTENING UP ON EXPENDITURES, NOT INCREASING RICE AND FUEL PRICES, AND ASSURING FAIR DISTRIBUTION OF NEEDED ITEMS. (PARA) THE GOVERNING ELITE SHARES WITH THE CAMBODIAN COMMUNISTS A DISLIKE AND DISTRUST OF SIHANOUK. IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THE CAMBODIAN PARTIES IN A POST- WAR SETTLEMENT COULD AGREE TO THE RETURN OF THE PRINCE AS A COMPROMISE LEADER; THE CAMBODIAN ELITE BECAUSE HE HAS THREATENED VENGEANCE UPON THEM AND THE COMMUNISTS BECAUSE HE PERSECUTED THEM WHEN HE WAS IN POWER AND REPRESENTS THE MONARCHICAL PAST. (PARA) THE TWO GREATEST CONCERNS FELT BY THE GKR FOR THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE ARE THAT THE VC/ NVA WILL NOT REMOVE THEMSELVES FROM CAMBODIAN TERRITORY DESPITE THE SIGNING OF A PEACE AGREEMENT AND THAT VC/ NVA ADVISORS AND WEAPONS WILL BE LEFT WITH CAMBODIAN COMMUNIST MAIN FORCE UNITS. A UNILATERAL DECLARATION OF CESSATION OF OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS WAS IGNORED BY THE OPPOSING ENEMY FORCES AND IN FACT INCREASED THE MILITARY PRESSURE ON THE FANK. (PARA) THE GKR BELIEVES, PERHAPS OVER OPTIMISTICALLY, THAT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN IT AND THE CAMBODIAN COMMUNISTS CAN BE SORTED OUT IF THE VIETNAMESE COMMUNISTS WILL LEAVE. THE GOVERNMENT HAS INDICATED ITS WILLINGNESS TO PERMIT OPEN POLITICAL COMPETITION BY THE CAMBODIAN COMMUNISTS WITHIN THE PRESENT POLITICAL SYSTEM. IT BASES THIS BELIEF ON THE EXPERIENCE IN CAMBODIA FOLLOWING THE FRENCH INDOCHINA WAR WHEN A LARGE NUMBER OF DISSIDENTS, PEOPLE WHO WERE FIGHTING FRENCH DOMINATION, WERE BROUGHT OVER TO THE GOVERNMENT PEACEFULLY. HOWEVER, THE LOCAL COMMUNIST PARTY AT THAT TIME WAS RUDIMENTARY AND COMPLETELY DOMINATED BY THE VIET MINH AND THE SAME SITUATION DOES NOT APPEAR TO OBTAIN NOW. THE GOVERNMENT HAS MADE SOME PRELIMINARY CONTACTS WITH NATIONALIST FACTIONS WITHIN THE CAMBODIAN INSURGENCY, BUT AS YET THERE HAVE BEEN NO NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE HARD- LINE COMMUNISTS, MANY OF WHOM WERE TRAINED IN NORTH VIETNAM. RUSH

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